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SUBJECT: SECRETARY LEAVITT'S OCTOBER 10-11 VISIT TO THAILAND

¶11. (U) Summary: In meetings with interlocutors during his visit to Thailand October 10 and 11, HHS Secretary Leavitt underscored the importance of transparency and international cooperation in confronting the threat of avian influenza (AI) and in planning containment and pandemic preparedness efforts. The composition of the Secretary's delegation - which included the Director of the

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U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Director of the U.S. National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Disease (NIAID), the Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO), the Assistant Director General of the Food and Agriculture Association(FAO), and the President of the International Animal Health Code of the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) - itself represented a model for international animal and human health collaboration. Major topics for discussion included the stockpiling of anti-virals (Tamiflu), human AI vaccine research and production, training at the Thailand Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP), and continued close collaboration between the Thai Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) and the Bangkok-based U.S. CDC team. Secretary Leavitt's activities in Thailand included a meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Pinij Jarusombat, a meeting with Minister of Health Dr. Suchai Charoenratanakul, participation in a ceremony marking the 25th anniversary of the Thailand MoPH-U.S. CDC Collaboration, a roundtable discussion with International Organizations, and a visit to Charoen Pokphand Foods PCL (CP), a large, commercial poultry farm approximately 65 miles north of Bangkok. End summary.

MoPH: IPAPI, Tamiflu Stockpile, Vaccines, and Training

¶12. (U) The meeting at the MoPH was more like a roundtable discussion with participation by the Secretary, CDC Director Dr. Julie Gerberding, NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci, WHO, FAO, OIE, the Minister, and several heads of sections of MoPH. Minister Suchai opened the meeting by stating that Thailand appreciates the ten core principles of the International Partnership on Avian Pandemic Influenza (IPAPI) and intends to join the partnership. He also opened the discussion of stockpiling anti-viral medications (Tamiflu) by acknowledging that production capacity cannot possibly meet current worldwide demand. (Swiss company Roche is the sole producer of Oseltamivir, trade name Tamiflu.) Minister Suchai said that the global shortage of anti-virals creates a need for countries to pool their resources to create a regional stockpile. He said that Thailand would contribute 35,000 Tamiflu capsules, representing 5 percent of Thailand's total stock, to a Southeast Asia regional stockpile. He urged other countries, including the U.S., to make a similar contribution. He offered Thailand as a "staging point" for a regional stockpile run by WHO, but said Thailand would accept any location that countries in the region could agree upon. (Note: Thailand's commitment to make a substantial contribution to a regional stockpile even if not located on Thailand's soil is an extraordinary step for Thailand to make in terms of regional cooperation.)

¶13. (U) Secretary Leavitt agreed that the first step in preventing an AI pandemic is international cooperation and coordination. He said HHS was committed to supporting the close relationship with the FETP. He also said that containment of an outbreak within a specific locality is a top priority, and acknowledged that pre-positioning of supplies would be important in this effort. To that effect, the Secretary said the U.S. can commit to contributing personal protective equipment. He added, however, that HHS was still considering whether to contribute to a regional stockpile of Tamiflu.

¶14. (U) The Secretary and NIAID Director Dr. Fauci briefed Minister Suchai on recent AI vaccine trials in the U.S. Dr.

Fauci said that preliminary results were promising - a vaccine provided in a 4-dose regimen provided an immune response that was predictive for protection against the virus. In response to Thai long-standing requests to collaborate with the U.S. on AI vaccine trials, the Secretary and Dr. Fauci stated that the U.S. will share the

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results of its own trials with the Thais when they are available, and that it will seek collaboration with Thailand for a future trial. At this time, however, there is not enough clinical material on hand to expand the trial to other countries. The Secretary added that he would like to see Thailand produce its own human vaccine, since even after U.S.-Thai collaboration on trials takes place, production capacity will still be limited.

¶5. (U) Minister Suchai asked for U.S. assistance to expand the number of students from countries in the region to attend the epidemiological training course offered at Thailand's Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP). The Secretary said he was very gratified by the past success of

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this program and noted that several high-level health officials from governments in the region are graduates of the program. He said he is equally impressed by Thailand's quick restructuring of the course content to focus on AI to enhance the ability of healthcare workers in the region to detect and investigate AI outbreaks. He said he will be pleased to increase U.S. support in order to build up a regional network of epidemiologists trained through the program.

¶6. (U) Other participants at the meeting expressed their views, as well: WHO Director General Jong-Wook Lee emphasized the importance of transparency and timeliness in reporting surveillance activities. FAO Assistant Director General He Changchui encouraged good interagency cooperation, especially between the MoPH and Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (MoAC). The President of OIE's Terrestrial Animal Health Standards Commission Alejandro Thiermann noted that efforts to contain AI should focus activities to break the two most vulnerable links of transmission - segregation of domestic poultry from wild waterfowl and minimized contact between humans and poultry.

UN Organizations: More on IPAPI, Vaccines, and Stockpiles

¶7. (U) At a luncheon and working meeting hosted by WHO and attended by the Secretary and his delegation, the Thai MoPH, and UN and other International Organizations, the earlier discussions at the MoPH carried over on the same topics, often by the same individuals. Secretary Leavitt led off the meeting with a discussion of IPAPI, urging governments to work closely with WHO and FAO and to follow open, transparent, and timely reporting of animal and human cases of AI. The Secretary added that current focus on AI should not cause governments to neglect other infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, malaria, and HIV/AIDS.

¶8. (U) WHO Director Lee welcomed the IPAPI initiative and said that WHO and nations of the world must work closely with the United States government to address the AI problem. He emphasized that the economic effects of an avian flu pandemic would be as severe as the cost in human lives. The economic costs of the SARS outbreak several years ago has been estimated to be greater than \$30 billion globally, he said, whereas the economic costs of an avian flu pandemic would likely dwarf that figure. To prevent the enormous costs in lives and damage to the global economy, nations must act in collaboration to "pounce" on outbreaks with anti-virals, culling, quarantine, and other measures to contain an outbreak at its earliest stage.

¶9. (U) FAO Assistant Director General He Changchui agreed that the primary emphasis should be to address an outbreak at its source - in animals. To that end, he said that FAO has been working closely with Southeast Asian governments, WHO, the OIE and others. He said that FAO has spent \$5.5 million since February 2004 on technical cooperation projects addressing AI in animals with Thailand's MoAC and with other government ministries in the region.

¶10. (U) The President of OIE's Terrestrial Animal Health Standards Commission Alejandro Thiermann said that small farmers in the region have paid the biggest price so far, seeing their flocks culled often with inadequate or no compensation. He said that the means to interrupt AI virus transmission - segregating wild waterfowl from domestic poultry, culling and vaccinations to prevent AI transmission among domestic poultry, and minimizing human-poultry interaction - are difficult to implement in Southeast Asia where wild birds, poultry, and humans often live in close proximity. He suggested that the smallest investment with

the biggest impact would be technical assistance to build capacity in the region for surveillance, detection, and prevention of outbreaks in animals.

¶11. (SBU) There followed a general discussion on vaccine production. Margaret Chan, WHO Assistant Director General & Representative of the Director General for Pandemic Influenza, expressed concern about regulatory, licensing, and liability issues, as well as a potential market failure as traditionally companies worry about overproduction of vaccines and slack demand. Presently, there is not enough supply to meet worldwide demand, but will that demand be sustained? NIAID Director Fauci agreed that sustained demand for vaccine was an important issue that companies will examine before ramping up production. Increasing international demand for seasonal human influenza vaccines is one approach to encourage vaccine manufacturers to increase their vaccine production capacity. Such increased capacity would become particularly important in the event of a pandemic where hundreds of millions of doses would need to be produced very rapidly.

¶12. (SBU) Thailand does not presently produce its own influenza vaccines but does produce other human vaccinations. Secretary Leavitt repeated his desire to see Thailand and other countries in the region develop their own vaccine manufacturing capacity. Secretary Leavitt said that the U.S. was prepared to offer technical assistance to Thailand and other nations to develop vaccine production capacity. (Note: At a reception later that evening, the Secretary emphasized to World Bank Thailand Country

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Director Ian Porter the importance of building Thailand's capacity to produce a human AI vaccine. Mr. Porter, listened, understood, but was non-committal on WB support.)

¶13. (SBU) Minister Suchai repeated his assertion that the number one priority for Thailand was the creation of a regional stockpile of Tamiflu. WHO Director General Lee said that WHO has an MOU with Roche on a "virtual stockpile" of Tamiflu whereby Roche has agreed to dispatch up to 30 million doses (3 million treatment courses) of Tamiflu anywhere in the world at WHO request should a human-to-human outbreak occur. WHO would expedite customs clearance in the host country and rush the shipment to the local site of the outbreak. Dr. Lee expressed concern about pooling of national resources because "when an outbreak occurs, the reality is that countries will worry about their own people first."

¶14. (SBU) Secretary Leavitt voiced his own concerns: The U.S. uses stockpiling for several types of commodities, he said, and this has not always been a workable strategy. He noted that work still needs to be done on containment strategies at the local level. For example, how do we decide if an outbreak is containable? NIAID Director Fauci added that another question should be addressed - are current containment plans effective or realistic enough so that stockpiling would have the desired impact? There needs to be assurance, he said, that political will at the top levels can be matched by implementation capability at operational levels.

DPM: Thailand Helping Neighboring Countries

¶15. (U) During his meeting with Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) Phinij Jarusombat, who formally welcomed Secretary Leavitt to Thailand on behalf of PM Thaksin, who was on travel to Europe, Secretary Leavitt outlined the reasons for his visit to Thailand, citing the urgency of the avian flu situation. Secretary Leavitt noted he was accompanied by WHO Director

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General Lee and a staff of noted epidemiologists, which underscored the gravity the AI situation. "An avian flu case anywhere is a threat everywhere," said the Secretary, as he expressed appreciation to the Royal Thai Government for its efforts to combat the disease and its cooperation internationally.

¶16. (U) The Deputy Prime Minister thanked Secretary Leavitt and the U.S. government for its technical cooperation with Thailand, and noted that Thailand itself has assisted neighboring, less developed countries, with technical cooperation. "Each country should help according to its needs," he said. Noting that Thailand had not suffered a human AI case since September, 2004, the DPM wished Secretary Leavitt a productive visit.

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¶17. (U) At the close of the meeting, Secretary Leavitt said the U.S. government welcomed PM Thaksin's decision, during his recent meeting with President Bush, to lift Thailand's

ban on U.S. beef imports, and asked DPM Phinij how the decision would be implemented. DPM said the decision would be enacted following proper procedures, and cited the Ministry of Agriculture's jurisdiction over the process.

Thailand MoPH-U.S. CDC Collaboration: 25 Year Anniversary

¶18. (U) Secretary Leavitt, CDC Director Gerberding, and MoPH Minister Suchai spoke at a colorful outdoor celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Thailand MoPH-U.S. CDC Collaboration. In his remarks, Minister Suchai reviewed the history of the Collaboration and noted that the Collaboration's activities in Thailand have focused mainly on epidemiology training at the FETP, HIV/AIDS research and programmatic activities through the HHS Global AIDS Program and early-warning disease detection through HHS/CDC's International Emerging Infections Program. Because of the long MoPH-CDC partnership, he said, the Collaboration was able to focus immediate attention on the avian influenza outbreak last year and work together closely to answer epidemiological, surveillance, and other important research and public health questions.

¶19. (U) Secretary Leavitt praised the U.S.-Thai health cooperation over the past quarter-century, especially on infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), and pandemic influenza. He expressed condolence to Thailand for the heavy economic and human costs Thailand has experienced recently from the tsunami, as well as avian influenza, and thanked the Thai

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government for its offers of assistance after Hurricane Katrina.

¶20. (U) CDC Director Gerberding said that the Thailand MoPH-U.S. CDC Collaboration was the "jewel in the crown" of international health collaborations and was pleased with the success of the FETP. At the conclusion of the ceremony, a placard carrying the logo of the Thailand MoPH-U.S. CDC Collaboration was launched high into the sky by numerous helium balloons of red, white, and blue - the colors of both the Thai and U.S. flags.

Large-Scale Commercial Poultry Farm Visit: High Biosecurity

¶21. (U) Secretary Leavitt and his delegation also visited a large-scale commercial poultry farm owned and operated by Charoen Pokphand Corporation (CP), the largest agricultural company in Thailand and a leading exporter of chicken products. The purpose of this visit was to demonstrate that the commercial poultry industry in Thailand, which is geared towards exports, has a self-serving interest in keeping AI under control in Thailand as well as in neighboring countries that could serve as virus reservoirs.

¶22. (U) The Secretary observed the operations of one of the largest, vertically integrated commercial chicken farms and processing plant in Thailand, and was particularly impressed by the first rate biosecurity measures practiced at the farm. CP company agreed to allow the Secretary and his delegation inside the facilities only because the chickens were only two days away from scheduled slaughter and processing so that contamination was less of a concern than would be the case if the chickens were younger. Even then, the Secretary was made to don a hat, face mask, gown, and two changes of boots, as well as undergo a disinfectant spray before entering the facilities.

¶23. (U) Once inside CP officials briefed the Secretary on farm procedures, emphasizing their care to ensure complete segregation of their chickens from wild birds from the time they are day-old chicks to birds ready for harvest. Contact with human farm workers is also minimized through the use of automated feeding and watering devices, and monitoring of the temperature-regulated building through closed circuit TV monitoring. The biosecurity features cut costs as well - a single human overseer can look after more than 100,000 chickens.

¶24. (U) CP officials told the Secretary that because of the possible negative impact on its poultry exports, Thailand preferred these strict biosecurity measures to poultry vaccinations - vaccinated poultry are difficult to distinguish from poultry that have been exposed to AI, and importing countries such as the EU would not import such birds. Other countries in the region, by contrast, produce poultry almost entirely for domestic consumption, and thus are more interested in [developing and] using AI vaccines for poultry.

¶25. (U) CP officials also noted that approximately 80 percent of Thailand's chicken meat exports (Thailand exports only processed meat) come from large-scale farms. About 20

percent come from medium-sized farms that often have less stringent biosecurity practices. CP officials emphasized, however, that the threat from AI - to the general public and to their own business - comes from the millions of families engaged in "backyard" chicken farming where a family might raise a dozen or less poultry for its own consumption. In these types of households, chickens, ducks, and humans, often share the same living space - a perfect setting for AI transmission. When asked by the Secretary whether public behavior could be modified so that "backyard" chicken farming could eventually be phased out altogether and chickens raised only under biosecure conditions, the CP officials were not optimistic. This would require a change in culture, they said, and even though it might be possible to fathom such a change in Thailand, it is unlikely to occur in our lifetimes in rural areas in other countries in the region.

¶26. (U) Another item worth noting at the CP visit was the comment by one of the company officials that they (CP) regard the MoAC as an important "middle man" in getting the biosafety word out to the larger community. This is an interesting contrast to the U.S. model where agribusinesses act as the community multiplier of good agricultural practices and the government is the source of research and policies.

¶27. (U) Secretary Leavitt and his delegation visited a contract farm that provides some 8,000 birds to CP and follows the biosafety methodologies developed by the larger company. CP only buys some twenty percent of its birds from farms provided they show adequate animal health practices. Meeting the CP standards is not easy and CP plans to reduce the number of contract farmers that it uses, eventually bringing all bird production back under its own roof.

¶28. (U) Secretary Leavitt and the delegation did not have an opportunity to clear this message.

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